

WEEK BEGINNING MONDAY, AUGUST 23, 1948

MILTON STIEFEL

Presents

SIGNE HASSO

in

“LAURA”

by

Vera Caspary and George Sklar

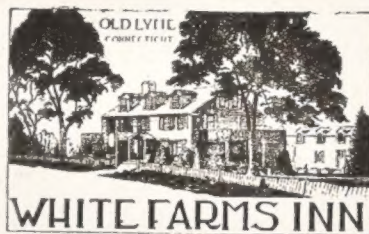
with

Brandon Peters and John Forsythe

STAGED BY MR. STIEFEL

Production Designed by Don Finlayson

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—CAST OF CHARACTERS—

In the Order of their Appearance

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Danny Dorgan Edward Strum

Waldo Lydecker Brandon Peters

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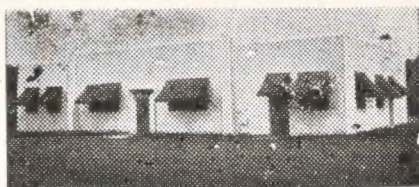
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CAST OF CHARACTERS (Continued)

A Girl **SIGNE HASSO**

Olsen **Leonard Lord**

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THE IVORYTON PLAYHOUSE



Early in the 1800's, Comstock-Cheney & Company, a firm manufacturing ivory items and with its own fleet of ships to bring the elephant ore from Africa, built a factory in a small Connecticut community, a community which later was to be named Ivoryton after the industry which helped it to continue growing through the years.

To provide a theatre for the members of this community, Comstock-Cheney & Company built a playhouse on a little green knoll under a big tree. That was in 1908, and touring companies of vaudeville and stock performers brought the entertainment for the community. In 1915, silent movies moved in, and the villagers were entertained by the images on the silver screen. The small theater was a silent picture house until 1928. Then the talkies came, silent movies became a thing of the past, and the door was closed upon another entertainment era.

But the theatre in Ivoryton was not to be abandoned.

The Ivoryton Playhouse was launched as a summer stock theatre in 1930 by Milton Stiefel, not as a commercial enterprise, but rather in the spirit of bravado and fun. In the first season's cast were Isabel Jewell, Will Greer, Virginia Howel, Irving Stiefel, David Clark, and Michael Barr. Frederick Fox, now eminent New York stage designer, came fresh from Yale and executed the sets. Mr. Stiefel, the company, et al, had lots of fun in the Connecticut countryside. Much swimming, boating, and socializing was in the order of the day. Rehearsals were short and only five performances were given weekly. This made the summer ideal, but before many weeks had passed the financial losses mounted. Eventually, the company and management buckled down to hard work. The Ivoryton Playhouse began to take on a more serious aspect. Rehearsals grew longer, publicity became stronger and, before the end of that first season, the Playhouse "began to break even." "The Little Church Mouse" was tried out and later became an instantaneous hit in New York with Ruth Gordon and Bert Lytell in the leading roles.

The second season the Playhouse began to show a profit. It was during this summer that Katharine Hepburn was introduced to Connecticut audiences. Her reception was spontaneous and she became the leading lady. Some of the plays she appeared in were "The Little Accident" "Let Us Be Gay," "The Man Who Came Back" (with Henry Hull). Norma Terris was probably the first star to appear at the Playhouse and opened the season in "The Climax."

Among the many other personalities who were discovered by Stiefel and received their early training at the Playhouse were Buddy Ebsen, then fresh

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from vaudeville; Haila Stoddard, then a brilliant youngster straight from California. Haila became the leading lady and held her place here for three years, as did subsequently Penny Singleton. Cornell Wilde was another young Ivoryton find as was Rosemary DeCamp and Willard Parker. Martha Scott and Betty Field were also unknowns when they trod the Ivoryton boards, as was Bill Bendix and Celeste Holm, leading lady of the 1941 season.

Included in the list of theatrical great who have appeared at Connecticut's pioneer summer theater as stars are: Lillian Gish, Tallulah Bankhead, Elisabeth Bergner, Ethel Waters, Blanche Yurka, Dame May Whitty, Paul Robeson, Brian Aherne, Edward Everett Horton, James Dunn, Kay Francis, Joan Caulfield, John Payne, Mischa Auer, and Bert Wheeler.

And then there are the Hartmans, Paul and Grace, who for years had been the toast of the night clubs as dance satirist par excellence, but who had never graced a Broadway stage until the fall of 1947 when their intimate review, "Angel in the Wings," which had a pre-New York showing at Ivoryton, became an instantaneous hit.

In 1948 the summer theatre industry is *big business*. More actors are employed in summer theatres than in any other facet of the theatrical industry. The Ivoryton Playhouse and its management is proud, indeed, of the part it has played in making summer theatre what it is today. Ivoryton is grateful to its patrons who made that part possible.

What will the next step bring in this growing industry? Here at Ivoryton there is a debate going on between the patrons who are in favor of enlarging the house to accommodate the ever-growing audiences and the patrons who oppose such an idea. Those who do not want the theatre made large argue that it would lose its "intimacy" and "charm". The others insist that Ivoryton must accept the challenge of its inevitable growth. The management at Ivoryton is frankly at a loss to know which faction presents the accurate picture.

Next season this pioneer summer theatre will be 20 years old. It will be a milestone worthy of celebration.